

**Historic District Commission  
Town Hall, Room 126  
Final Meeting Minutes, May 5, 2015**

**Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM. Attending Kathy Acerbo-Bachmann (KAB), David Honn (DH), Pamela Lynn (PL), Ron Regan (RR), Anita Rogers (AR) and David Foley (DF).**

**David Shoemaker (DS) absent.**

**7:00 PM      Citizens' Questions:**

**7:01 PM      Approved minutes by consent – April 14, 2015 Minutes**

**7:02 PM      June 1<sup>st</sup> Acton Center Traffic Study**

KAB shared Corey York's invitation to the HDC to attend.

**7:05 PM      Front Door: 25 – 27 School Street**

The application has been withdrawn due to a decision to postpone replacing the door and to replace siding first.

KAB requested that the liaison try to make contact on letterhead concerning the newspaper ad that had alluded to demolishing the back portion of the structure.

Issues with regard to this application triggered a conversation about revising and sending the "annual" HDC letter to property holders.

**7:20 PM      Historic District Commission Members and Officers**

KAB shared an invitation to an upcoming meeting to discuss the town's new Land Use position. RR, DH and DF will plan to attend. DF expressed concern about an absence of a description explaining how this position will interact with existing committees and commissions.

KAB would like this group to focus on the role of enforcement within this position as the HDC and the BD have not had an opportunity to do so.

DF hoped the BoS has written a mission statement with goal and objectives.

KAB amplified the issue that all other adjudicatory boards have a staff person assigned to support their work except HDC.

KAB asked DH to write a letter expressing the HDC's position.

KAB shared that she and PL will be retiring in June.

KAB explained the roles – Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary.

**7:31 PM      14 Newtown Road – Discussion of Amendments to Approved Application**

The applicants could not attend. KAB explained the request to put solar panels on the back of the barn as shown in the application.

KAB expressed her concerns about allowing solar panels on homes versus commercial buildings. The applicant has proposed using a flat panel array whose panel surface would be approximately 6" above the shingle roof with a metal side "skirt" disguising the sides of the panels (see Photoshopped images provided in the application).

DF felt there was a difference between solar panels on commercial buildings which are functional whereas solar panels are at odds with the character of residential properties. DF reminded the Commission of all the paraphernalia required by such an installation that will likely be visible from the public way. DF would wish the panels to be flush to the dimensions of the roof and masked as much as possible.

AR would not wish the installation to be competing with the rake so it would be distinguishable from the original. She wants to see the edge of roof. It should not go beyond the plane of the wall. She also opposes the skirt.

PL would minimize the panels as described by AR.

RR was not opposed to having panels visible on an outbuilding or barn back away from the street. Specific to 14 Newtown Rd. the fact that the edge of the panel would be visible from on the back roof of the barn was not a concern.

DH reflected on a previous application to locate solar panels on a Spruce St. roof. After much discussion the HDC voted to locate the panels 1-3 feet from the edge and recognize in retrospect that the panels stand out more than if the panels were taken to the edge of the roof.

Because of the complex reactions among the HDC members the decision will be deferred until the applicants can be present.

**8:00 PM      Public Hearing: Application 1506 – 29 Windsor Ave., New Addition**

RR recused himself as an abutter.

KAB opened the public hearing by reading the legal notice from The Beacon and explained the order to be followed during the hearing.

AR provided a brief summary of the proposal: to attach a two- vehicle garage and master bedroom suite to the existing structure. The garage is visible from the public way (Windsor Avenue); the master bedroom suite is not visible from the public way and thus not within the HDC's jurisdiction.

Tom Peterman (TP), the architect, and Judy Kotanchik (JK), the applicant, using the Schematic Design drawings of December 19, 2014 described the project. The existing home is a Greek Revival structure, circa 1840's, with several later additions forming a right to left array. The gable end of the original house faces Windsor Avenue. A detached garage, circa 1920s, is visible from Windsor Avenue. The house is located in the NE corner of the lot. The septic system is located in the back of the property.

The existing first and second floor plans will be retained (no demolition work) including three bedrooms and a bath located on the second floor.

Existing exterior materials visible from the public way include clapboard, asphalt shingles and double hung windows and typical Greek Revival gable detailing. An exterior deck will be rebuilt but is not visible from the public way.

Modifications recommended by HDC include adding an additional window on the front elevation and rehangng the original shutters.

TP explained various aspects of the proposed scheme noting that the garage roof pitch will match the original Greek Revival roof pitch. Corner board, rake and trim details and dimensions will also match the existing structure. The garage doors will be painted wood with glass lites above. The master bedroom suite roof pitch is low so it will not be seen from the public way.

DH asked if there is an architectural reason why the master bedroom suite roof is pitched so low other than the desire not to be seen from the public way? TP indicated that the decision to use a low roof pitch was due to the complexity of the existing roof lines.

AR asked what the height was in the garage from the slab to the top of the wall plate. TP indicated eight inches to two feet. AR rephrased the question inquiring about the dimension from the slab to the frieze. Answer: 8 feet. TP explained that this dimension could be reduced but seems to be proportionally correct. AR concurred.

Wayne Friederichs (WF) of 24 Windsor Ave. complimented the plan as a whole especially the roof lines. He expressed concern about the amount of exposed concrete foundation area on the façade of the garage. TP responded that the grade falls naturally on that direction and that exposed concrete would be kept to a minimum and disguised with foundation plantings.

Nancy Lenicheck of 24 Windsor asked why the garage faces to the side.

Julie Towell of 38 Windsor Ave. indicated that this was the issue for the group as a whole.

TP described the issue of the grade and that there would need to be a retaining wall along the right side (from the street) if the grade was lowered to the garage entrance, or the property would have to be raised up so that the garage was at the same level as the house and then graded down to the left.

WF asked about why the three windows on the garage are not the same size as the windows on the original house. The HDC had suggested to the applicant that the windows be essentially one half of a double hung window as an indication of the subsidiary, non-occupied nature of the garage building.

Neil Hickey (NH) of 33 Windsor Ave. asked why the garage doors face to the side and not to the front. DH responded that the existing conditions on Windsor Avenue are such that existing garages/carriage houses/barns with front facing doors are detached outbuildings that are placed well back from the front facades of the houses facing Windsor Avenue. Once a garage/carriage house/barn is attached to the main house it is a fundamentally different architectural concept. Deliberately attached garages with garage doors facing the street are a post WWII car culture phenomenon incompatible with the remainder of the houses on Windsor Avenue within the District.

JT asked about the expanse of the proposed driveway. TP responded that since the garage is essentially square in plan then the width of the garage would be the same no matter which way the garage is oriented. The grade drops approximately three feet from the elevation of Windsor Avenue to the garage entrance. This places the majority of the driveway paving and apron below street level. If the garage doors were to be located on the front elevation all of the paving would be visible.

Eleanor Cheverort (EC) of 37 Windsor Ave. asked about how close the garage would be to the lot line. Answer: Approximately 24 feet.

KAB noted that in earlier schemes presented to the HDC, the garage volume was essentially equal to the house volume. The garage competed for prominence with the original house. KAB explained the HDC's reasoning for rejecting those schemes; i.e. the lack of emphasis on the

original, Greek revival home's prominence towards Windsor Avenue. Subsequent additions, including, in this case, the garage, should appear additive and subordinate to the main house. This is a typical, New England vernacular residential growth pattern observable in many historic districts. DH described the front elevation as an example of houses and separate storage or barn type structures which often became attached to the main residence over time.

Renee Robins of 53 Windsor Ave. asked about when drawings had been viewed with the garage doors facing forward. She asked whether a single car garage had been considered.

AR responded how a one-door garage would still be close to the street and to the abutter.

JT reiterated her previous question about why the HDC accepted an attached garage.

KAB explained that the HDC looks at each property both individually and within its context.

Rose Hickey of 33 Windsor Ave emphasized that it does not fit.

Scott Kutil (SK) of 43 Windsor Ave. explained that the houses on the street generally extend from front (sidewalk) to rear (rear yard). This house is an exception in that it extends from side to side. He noted that there is nothing in the bylaw preventing the HDC from requesting that an applicant move a leaching field to accommodate an addition.

JK, the applicant, clarified that the lot is also not as deep as the other lots. As she has a special needs daughter, she is trying to modify the house in a practical way. Preserving access to the cellar is also an issue.

JT emphasized that most do not object to the addition. She explained that the neighbors were concerned about the garage doors facing to the side and not forward. She thought that if the doors faced forward, they would accept it.

SK emphasized that he did not agree with this generalization. He thought the garage should be moved back.

EC asked again to consider turning the garage.

Renee Robins asked to see the floor plan again and asked whether there was a way to push the addition back? She wondered if there was a way to reorient what space shares the inner garage wall.

AR suggested focusing on the impact on the grade if the doors were on the front.

Renee Robins asked how long the garage is planned to be. TP answer: About 24 feet by 24 feet which is a typical two vehicle garage dimension.

Larry Roberts of 44 Windsor Ave. has no personal objection to either plan. He recognized the need to make this small house livable and that it would be a waste of money to put in a one-car garage.

KAB asked for clarification that the garage is about the same size as the original house. TP answer: Yes.

SK inquired whether there was a way to push the addition back a bit more by moving the deck in the back. JK, the applicant, explained how SK's suggestion would be quite a sacrifice as it is a dark lot.

NH reiterated his desire that HDC consider that the garage doors be located on the front elevation of the addition.

KAB closed the public hearing after answering NH's question about the HDC's next steps in the process. KAB explained how an extension to an application works.

KAB congratulated the applicant for hiring an architect to look at this project and come up with a good compromise. She has struggled with the reality that the addition is the size of the original house. It was of primary concern that the original house remain the focal point whether the garage would be front facing or side facing. The choice would

come down to an attached garage in competition with the front façade. An attached garage feels 1950s, 1970s, or 1980's. Had there been a way to have a suitable detached garage she would have accepted it but there is not.

DH expressed the same concerns as KAB. The HDC's previous reviews reduced the garage volume and simplified the details so as not to upstage the house. The garage doors could be further simplified by thickening the garage wall allowing the doors to be recessed into the volume and always in shadow.

DF agrees that the proposal is not consistent with the house but to push the addition back would necessitate demolition of an existing structure which would not be additive. If turned to be front-facing, it would be detrimental to the property with a large retaining wall and a drop off for front facing doors.

KAB asked TP to explain the required retaining wall. There would be two possible locations for a retaining wall and a good deal of it would be visible.

AR continued to feel that garage doors that close to the street would be an aberration. Pulling the drive to the side allows for landscaping that could soften the impact. The lack of any buffer between the sidewalk and garage doors would be stark.

PL expressed her positive reaction to the additive nature of the proposed addition.

KAB noted that HDC does not have purview of landscaping but asked JK if she had a solution with regard to landscaping.

KAB reiterated the central dilemma of the original house and the garage being the same size.

AR indicated that if there are not front-facing garage doors, there is an opportunity to soften the impact of the doors quite a bit.



DH suggested strategies to minimize the impact of asphalt by reducing its area using other paving materials.

KAB reminded the HDC that driveways are not part of their purview but there could be a recommendation to minimize and buffer their appearance.

DH returned to the point made by DF about the existing ground plane. It is flat, simple, forms an appropriate setting for the house and should be preserved.

AR moved to accepted the garage and master bedroom addition as drawn with the garage doors facing to the side with minimal grading of the site as depicted on the drawings dated 4/13/15.

The HDC recommends that the asphalt be minimized to the extent possible and recommends planting for screening with particular attention paid to headlight paths.

Seconded by DH. Accepted unanimously.

DH recommended exterior lighting that would minimize the impact on the abutters keeping the driveway as dark as possible. The applicant agreed to submit the light fixtures in an amendment.

KAB recommended that driveway width be minimized to allow a maximum planting width screen for the abutters.

There was a discussion concerning the timing of public hearings in regard to applications that require multiple reviews. Should the public hearing be scheduled earlier in the process? What are the ramifications of scheduling a public hearing earlier in the application process? It was agreed this topic would need further discussion.

10: 10 PM     Adjourned

Respectfully submitted,  
Pamela Lynn  
HDC Secretary

